WATER QUALITY TEAM MEETING NOTES

March 12, 2002
National Marine Fisheries Service Offices
Portland, Oregon

Introductions and Review of the Agenda.

Mark Schneider of NMFS and Mary Lou Soscia of EPA, WQT co-chairs, welcomed everyone to the meeting, held March 12 at the National Marine Fisheries Service offices in Portland, Oregon. The meeting was facilitated by Donna Silverberg. The meeting agenda and a list of attendees are attached as Enclosures A and B. Please note that some of the enclosures referenced in these meeting notes may be too lengthy to routinely attach to the minutes; please contact Kathy Ceballos (503/230-5420) to obtain copies.

2. EPA Fish Contaminant Survey.

EPA's Pat Zeronie led this discussion; Schneider noted that a fact sheet on EPA's Columbia River Basin Fish Contaminant Survey was emailed out to the WQT membership following the last meeting of the group (Enclosure C). Zeronie noted that the survey was undertaken in 1994, at the request of the CRITFC member tribes. EPA analyzed the samples for 121 different chemicals; the draft report was finished last year, released only to the tribes; we now have a second draft of the study, which has received limited public release and has been reported on in the media, Zeronie said.

Zeronie noted that the EPA survey focused on five anadromous (fall and spring chinook salmon, steelhead, smelt and lamprey) and six resident (rainbow trout, mountain whitefish, white sturgeon, walleye, largescale sucker and brideglip sucker) species. The bottom line is that EPA found many chemicals in the fish it sampled, particularly in resident fish samples: PCBs, DDE and mercury. More alarming is the fact that adults in CRITFC's member tribes who eat fish for 70 years at a high ingestion rate (48 meals per month) may have cancer risks that are 50 times higher than those for the general public who consume fish only once a month.

Zeronie spent a few minutes going through the handout, touching on some of the highlights of the EPA survey. She noted that there is no specific next phase for this survey; no one has really come to grips with how the contaminants, which are present mainly in the river sediments, might be cleaned up.

If anyone is interested in following up on the toxics issue, Zeronie said, Dean Foster's lab

at ODEQ has just finished some very elegant research. The NMFS Science Center is also interested in this topic, as is WDOE. There is an informal research network, she said; if there is interest in this issue at the WQT level, we could ask some of those researchers to participate in a future WQT meeting. She said she will also provide some additional information once more becomes available.

3. Data Quality Criteria Related to BiOp RPA 131.

Laura Hamilton read the appropriate section of the BiOp regarding QA/QC and redundant and backup monitoring. She then introduced this agenda item by noting that the Corps has developed a presentation of this topic. Hamilton thanked many of the other Corps and USGS employees who have contributed their time and effort to this issue, then introduced Dick Cassidy, who led the first part of this presentation. Cassidy noted that BiOp RPA 131 calls for a series of redundant water quality monitoring stations to ensure a continuous stream of accurate data; the Corps is proposing a series of data quality criteria as an alternative to those redundant stations. These criteria include:

1. Laboratory calibration
2. Calibration of secondary barometric pressure standard
3. Calibration of field instrument TDG sensor
4. Calibration of secondary standard thermister
5. Two fixed points
6. Two-point TDG sensor calibration
7. Suspected parameters
8. TDG pressure compared to secondary standard
9. Standby probe deployed
10. Thermistor compared to secondary standard
11. Field barometer compared to secondary standard
12. Depth of sensor
13. Data set completeness

Cassidy spent a few minutes going through his handout (Enclosure D); please refer to this document for details of Cassidy's presentation.

Next, Joe Rinella of USGS introduced the presentation on the USGS report, "Quality Assurance Data, Comparison to Water Qulaity Standards and Site Comparisons for Total Dissolved Gas and Water Temperature, Lower Columbia River, Oregon and Washington, 2001." In answer to a question from Cassidy, Rinella said the Corps now has plenty of redundant instruments.

Dwight Tanner led the presentation itself, first distributing copies of a handout showing the kinds of TDG daily checks the USGS performs (Enclosure E). Please refer to this handout for details of Tanner's presentation. Tanner touched on the daily checks USGS does on its TDG data, sample dissolved gas readings from earlier today at Warrendale, and some sample graphs

comparing TDG, temperature and barometric pressure at various sites around the basin.

For those interested in more details on this topic, Tanner said a report on USGS QA/QC methods is available via the following website: http://oregon.usgs.gov. Click on the "publications" link, then "online publications," then WRIR 01-4005.

What is the next step in this effort? Silverberg asked. For each of the entities here to review all of this information, and to come to the next WQT meeting prepared to discuss it, Tanner replied.

4. Regional Database/Data Management Systems.

Laura Hamilton of the Corps led this presentation, noting that she will be focusing on criteria for regional database management at today's meeting. She, too, spent a few minutes going through Enclosure D, ending with a series of conclusions/recommendations:

- That the process to establish regional standards begin immediately.
- That the data quality criteria in Enclosure D be established as regional standards for fixed monitoring stations, as modified by comments received.
- That any comments on these data quality criteria be submitted as soon as possible, so that the Corps can develop a set of criteria with broad regional acceptance.

Hamilton noted that she does need to select a data management system; she said she has looked at two, neither of which was completely satisfactory. She said she will be taking a training course on "Dazzler," a new Corps water quality data management system. It would be best if I could choose one already in use in the region, she said, so that we're not the only entity in the region using this system.

John Piccininni noted that there is a lot going on in this arena, regionally; he said the Power Planning Council has hired a contractor to develop an overarching structure for such a regional data management system. There is a definite need for data management criteria, and for a system that is acceptable to the entire region, he said. Mary Lou Soscia suggested that the Corps not attempt to reinvent the wheel; this discussion has been ongoing for almost 20 years, she said, and I would encourage the Corps to talk to folks at LCREP, in particular, because they have a key database that the Corps' water quality database needs to match up with.

Basically what I'm saying is that, regardless of the data management system chosen, there is a need to agree on a common set of criteria or parameters, Hamilton said – a standardized way of entering data so that everything matches up.

So you want to know if others in the region are willing to sign on to these standards? Silverberg asked. That's part of it, yes, Hamilton replied. Again, said Soscia, I would encourage you to talk to LCREP, to get a feeling for how they set up systems that were compatible with moving forward and making good decisions. Cassidy noted that there are a large number of

internal and external hurdles that will have to be overcome before this regional database becomes a reality.

It would be very helpful if the other agencies involved in Water Quality Team could work with the Corps to develop criteria for the water quality database, Hamilton said – I would like to work as closely as possible with the WQT and others in the region to ensure that the data management system we choose is compatible with the region's needs.

5. Re-Engagement of the BiOp Mainstem Columbia River Water Quality Plan.

Jim Ruff distributed a NMFS letter titled "Policy-Level Assistance Requested for Water Quality Planning Effort." (Enc. F) We wanted the WQT to know this letter is coming so they can alert their management, said Ruff. The BiOp's Appendix B calls for the development of a systemwide water quality plan, Ruff said; for a variety of reasons, the water quality plan has been delayed. We think it's now time to re-focus ourselves on the development of that plan, he said, hence this letter, which will also be sent to the state water quality agencies, the tribes and the Mid-Columbia PUDs. Our thinking was that we could take the Council's Mainstem/Systemwide Water Quality Program Summary, which contains a laundry list of future water quality projects, as the framework for this effort; the shortcoming of that idea is that it contains no priorities. NMFS' idea is to convene a policy-level group that will set those priorities, which will be useful to both the Council's provincial review process and the BiOp implementation process, Ruff said.

What action does the WQT need to take on this? Silverberg asked. Essentially, what we're trying to do is develop a road map for the development of the water quality plan called for in Appendix B, said Schneider. Again, said Ruff, we wanted to give you a heads-up that this letter is coming; also, we were hoping you could suggest the right person at your agency to send the letter to. The letter will be sent out by the end of the week, as soon as we know who to send it to. John Piccininni suggested that NMFS also coordinate this letter with CBFWA. That's a good suggestion, said Ruff.

Jim Irish noted that BPA's understanding was that the action agencies would be fleshing out the outline, developed last fall, before other regional entities would be engaged in this process. That was agreed to by the attendees of that meeting, Irish said. I think we need a broader perspective, Ruff replied; the water quality plan has stalled, and now it needs to be jump-started. We want the original participants to re-engage, essentially, Schneider said.

Dave Ponganis said that, to be a truly basinwide water quality plan, this effort must involve the states and tribes, as well as the federal agencies. We need that larger involvement, he said, and it's timely to push ahead on that.

The action, then, at this point, is that Jim Ruff will coordinate with CBFWA; meanwhile the other participants will take this letter back to their agencies, and will let Jim Ruff or Mark Schneider know who they want to represent them at these discussions, Silverberg said. There

was no disagreement to this summary.

6. Other.

Russell Harding said that, on Friday, the Oregon EQC approved two waivers, one for USFWS for the Spring Creek Hatchery release, the other for the Corps' systemwide spill program beginning in April. Also, he said, the public comment period on the Lower Columbia TDG TMDL ends at 5 p.m. on April 5; a series of public meetings will be held between now and then.

Has there been any discussion of moving away from the annual waiver process, to a more long-term waiver? Ruff asked. Yes, Harding replied; the Commission has expressed interest in looking at that option.

Schneider reported that, last Friday afternoon, a group discussed RPA 143, the action item that calls for the development of a plan to look at the means of managing the Snake River thermal regime. Part of that discussion had to do with models, he said; in general, it was an extremely stimulating meeting. Our goal is to finish this effort by May 23, with the plan developed, Schneider said; given that goal, we'll be undertaking a pretty vigorous meeting schedule over the next two months. Soscia noted that EPA will be developing a paper laying out all of the monitoring and modeling information they have developed in recent years, to help lay the groundwork for this effort.

7. Next WQT Meeting Date.

The next meting of the Water Quality Team was set for Tuesday, April 16. Meeting summary prepared by Jeff Kuechle, BPA contractor.